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SUBJECT: USSR-PLO: Relations and the Peace Process

NESAM#86-20023X
SOVAM#86-20016X

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DATE 02/21/86
DOC NO NESA M # 86-20023X
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OCR 3
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Central Intelligence Agency



DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

19 February 1986

USSR-PLO: Relations and the Peace Process

Summary

The Soviets consistently opposed last year's 11 February PLO-Jordan accord and stepped up pressure on PLO Chairman Arafat to abandon the agreement prior to his latest round of meetings with King Hussein. [redacted]

[redacted] While Soviet efforts certainly contributed to the eventual failure of the Hussein-Arafat dialogue, [redacted]

[redacted] the talks in Amman would have collapsed under the weight of competing demands within the highly factionalized PLO, even without Soviet pressures. [redacted]

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Since his expulsion from Lebanon, Arafat's prime motivation has been to preserve his leadership position within the PLO which requires, at a minimum, the unity of Fatah. To achieve this, Arafat must balance demands by Fatah moderates who favor a negotiated

This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] the Israel-Jordan-Palestinian Branch, Arab-Israeli Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis and [redacted] the Regional Policy Branch, Third World Activities Division, Office of Soviet Analysis. Information as of 19 February 1986 was used in its preparation. Questions and comments should be directed to Chief, Arab-Israeli Division, [redacted]

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settlement and hardliners who seek a reunification with Syrian-backed Palestinians, closer ties with Moscow, and a return to the armed struggle. [REDACTED]

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Soviet Strategy

Since the conclusion of the 11 February 1985 Arafat-Hussein Accord, the Soviets have shown growing concern that an Arab-Israeli peace formula might emerge without a central Soviet role. Consequently, Moscow's ties with Arafat were increasingly strained as the Soviets closely monitored Arafat's diplomatic maneuvering and reinforced their longstanding call for an international conference on the Middle East. [REDACTED]

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The Soviets have increased their contact with Arafat since last fall, when it appeared that the Arafat-Hussein accord had faltered. Vladimir Polyakov, chief of the Foreign Ministry's Near East Department, met Arafat in Baghdad in November, and Soviet Ambassadors in various Middle Eastern capitals have hosted talks with him on numerous occasions since then. PLO Executive Committee member Faruq Qaddumi traveled to Moscow twice--in December and January--and was received by Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze. [REDACTED]

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[redacted] communiques issued after both the November and January PLO Executive Committee meetings in Baghdad make it clear that pro-Soviet hardliners instructed Arafat to refuse any negotiating framework in Amman that did not enjoy Soviet support and envision substantial Soviet participation. [redacted]

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Outlook

Moscow probably calculates that recent developments, such as the Syrian-Jordanian rapprochement, have increased Arafat's vulnerability, making him more susceptible to Soviet urgings to abandon the 11 February accord, resolve differences with the dissident Syrian-allied PLO factions, and end his dispute with Syrian President Assad. The Soviets apparently believe that Arafat is still the best available choice to head the PLO, and value a PLO that is more than a Syrian puppet, since it affords the USSR another entree into the Middle East.

Still, Moscow wants to limit Arafat's ability to pursue a solution of the Palestinian question that excludes the USSR or favors the US, and probably views a Palestinian reunification effort as the best way to keep Arafat in check. The Soviets are thus likely to step up efforts to reconcile enough of the PLO's factions to create a credible unity, but only on a basis that gives the more pro-Soviet and hardline leftists--the DFLP and PFLP--a greater say in policymaking.

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The upcoming Soviet Party Congress may offer some new indications in the status of Moscow's relations with Arafat. In particular, Arafat's decision to avoid or attend the Congress, as well as the treatment accorded him by his Soviet hosts if he does go, would give

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additional clues to the current state-of-play in Soviet-PLO relations. We believe Arafat is determined to maintain his independence, however, and will avoid commitments to the Soviets that would require accepting their dictates.

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